

Parents and Children:

(A SEQUEL TO "HOME EDUCATION.")

BY THE EDITOR.

I.—THE FAMILY.

"The family is the unit of the nation."—F. D. MAURICE.

It is probable that no other educational thinker has succeeded in affecting parents so profoundly as did Rousseau. *Emile* is little read now, but how many current theories of the regimen proper for children have, there, their unsuspected source? Everybody knows—and his cotemporaries knew it better than we—that Jean Jacques Rousseau had not enough sterling character to warrant him to pose as an authority on any subject, least of all on that of education. He sets himself down a poor thing, and we see no cause to reject the evidence of his *Confessions*. We are not carried away by the charm of his style; his "forcible feebleness" does not dazzle us. No man can say beyond that which he *is*, and there is a want of grit in his philosophic outpourings that removes most of them from the category of available thought.

But Rousseau had the insight to perceive one of those patent truths which, somehow, it takes a genius to discover; and, because truth is indeed prized above rubies, the perception of that truth gave him rank as a great teacher. Is *Jean Jacques* also among the prophets? people asked, and ask still; and thousands of fervent disciples amongst the educated parents of Europe, the fact that his teaching has filtered into many a secluded home of our own day, is answer enough. No other educationist has had a tithe of the influence exercised by Rousseau. Under the spell of his teaching, people in the fashionable world, like that Russian Princess Gallitzin, forsook

society, and went off with their children to some quiet corner where they could devote every hour of the day, and every power they had, to the fulfilment of the duties which devolve upon parents. Courtly mothers retired from the world, sometimes even left their husbands, to work hard at the classics, mathematics, science, that they might with their own lips instruct their children. "What else am I for?" they asked; and the feeling spread that the bringing up of the children was the one work of primary importance for men and women.

Whatever extravagance he had seen fit to advance, Rousseau would still have found a following, because he had chanced to touch a spring that opened many hearts. He was one of the few educationists who made his appeal to the parental instincts. He did not say, "We have no hope of the parents, let us work for the children!" Such are the faint-hearted and hopeless things we say to-day. What he said was, in effect, Fathers and mothers, this is your work, and you only can do it. It rests with you, parents of young children, to be the saviours of society unto a thousand generations. Nothing else matters. The avocations about which people weary themselves are as foolish child's play compared with this one serious business of bringing up our children in advance of ourselves.

People listened, as we have seen; the response to his teaching was such a letting out of the waters of parental enthusiasm as has never been before known nor since. And Rousseau, weak, and little worthy, was a preacher of righteousness in this, that he turned the hearts of the fathers to the children, and so far made ready a people prepared for the Lord. But alas, having secured the foundation, he had little better than wood, hay, and stubble to offer to the builders.

Rousseau succeeded, as he deserved to succeed, in awaking many parents to the binding character, the vast range, the profound seriousness of parental obligations. He failed, and deserved to fail, as he offered his own crude conceits by way of an educational code. But his success is very cheering. He perceived that God placed the training of every child in the hands of two, a father and a mother; and the response to his teaching proved that, as the waters answer to the drawing of the moon, so do the hearts of parents rise to the idea of the great work committed to them.

Though it is true, no doubt, that every parent is conscious

of unwritten laws, more or less definite and noble according to his own status, yet an attempt, however slight, to codify these laws may be interesting to parents.

"The family is the unit of the nation." This pregnant saying (which has been already referred to in the pages of the *Review*) suggests some aspects of the parents' calling. From time to time, in all ages of the world, communistic societies have arisen, sometimes for the sake of co-operation in a great work, social or religious, more recently by way of protest against inequalities of condition; but, in every case, the fundamental rule of such societies is, that the members shall have all things in common. We are apt to think, in our careless way, that such attempts at communistic association are fore-doomed to failure. But that is not the case. In the United States, perhaps because hired labour is less easy to obtain than it is with us, they appear to have found a congenial soil, and there many well-regulated communistic bodies flourish. There are failures too, many and disastrous, and it appears that these may usually be traced to one cause, a government enfeebled by the attempt to combine democratic and communistic principles, to dwell together in a common life, while each does what is right in his own eyes. A communistic body can thrive only under a vigorous and absolute rule.

A favourite dream of socialism, is—or was until the idea of collectivism obtained—that each State of Europe should be divided into an infinite number of small self-contained communes. Now it sometimes happens that the thing we desire is already realised, had we eyes to see. The family is, practically, a commune. In the family the undivided property is enjoyed by all the members in common, and in the family there is equality of social condition, with diversity of duties. In lands where patriarchal practice still obtains, the family merges into the tribe, and the head of the family is the chief of the tribe—a very absolute sovereign indeed. In our own country, families are usually small, parents and their immediate offspring, with the attendants and belongings which naturally gather to a household, and, let it not be forgotten, *form part of the family*. The smallness of the family tends to obscure its character, and we see no force in the phrase at the head of this chapter; we do not perceive that, if the unit of the nation is the natural

commune, the family, then is the family the social microcosm, pledged to carry on within itself all the functions of the State, with the delicacy, precision, and fulness of detail proper to work done on a small scale.

It by no means follows from this communistic view of the family that the domestic policy should be a policy of isolation; on the contrary, it is not too much to say that a nation is civilised in proportion as it is able to establish close and friendly relations with other nations, and that, not with one or two, but with many; and, conversely, that a nation is barbarous in proportion to its isolation; and does not a family decline in intelligence and virtue when from generation to generation it "keeps itself to itself"?

Again, it is probable that a nation is healthy in proportion as it has its own proper outlets, its colonies and dependencies, which it is ever solicitous to include in the national life. So of the nation in miniature, the family; the struggling families at the back, the orphanage, the mission, the necessitous of our acquaintance, are they not for the sustenance of the family in the higher life?

But it is not enough that the family commune maintain neighbourly relations with other such communes, and towards the stranger within the gates. The family is the unit of the nation, and the nation is an organic whole, a living body, built up, like the natural body, of an infinite number of living organisms. It is only as it contributes its quota towards the national life that the life of the family is complete. Public interests must be shared, public work taken up, the public welfare cherished—in a word, its integrity with the nation must be preserved—or the family ceases to be part of a living whole, and becomes positively injurious, as decayed tissue in the animal organism.

Nor are the interests of the family limited to those of the nation. As it is the part of the nation to maintain wider relations, to be in touch with all the world, to be ever in advance in the great march of human progress, so is this the attitude which is incumbent on each unit of the nation, each family, as an integral part of the whole. Here is the simple and natural realisation of the noble dream of *Fraternity*: each individual attached to a family by ties of love where not of blood; the families united in a federal bond to form the nation; the nations confederate in love and emulous in virtue, and all, nations and their families, playing

their several parts as little children about the feet and under the smile of the Almighty Father. Here is the divine order which every family is called upon to fulfil; a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, and, therefore, it matters infinitely that every family should realise the nature and the obligations of the family bond. As water cannot rise above its source, neither can we live at a higher level than that of the conception we form of our place and use in life. Let us ask the question—has this, of regarding all education and all civil and social relations from the stand-point of the *family*, any practical outcome? So much so, that perhaps there is hardly a problem of life for which it does not contain the solution. For example:—What shall we teach our children? Is there one subject that claims our attention more than another? Yes, there is a subject, or class of subjects, which has an imperative *moral* claim upon us. It is the duty of the nation to maintain relations of brotherly kindness with other nations; therefore, it is the duty of every family, as an integral part of the nation, to be able to hold brotherly speech with the families of other nations as opportunities arise; therefore, to acquire the speech of neighbouring nations is not only to secure an inlet of knowledge and a means of culture, but is a duty of that high morality (the morality of the family) which aims at universal brotherhood; therefore, every family would do well to cultivate two languages besides the mother tongue even in the nursery.

Again, a fair young Englishwoman was staying with her mother at a German *Kur-haus*. They were the only English people present, and probably forgot that the Germans are better linguists than we. The young lady sat through the long meals with her book, hardly interrupting her reading to eat, and addressing no more than one or two remarks to her mother, as—"I wonder what that mess is!" or, "How much longer shall we have to sit with these tiresome people?" Had she remembered that no family can live to itself, that she and her mother represented England, *were* England for that little German community, she would have imitated the courteous greetings which the German ladies bestowed on their neighbours.

But we must leave further consideration of this great subject, and conclude with a striking passage from Mr. Morley's 'Appreciation' of *Emilius*. "Education slowly came to be thought of in connection with the family. The improvement of

ideas upon education was only one phase of the great general movement towards the restoration of the family, which was so striking a spectacle in France after the middle of the century. Education now came to comprehend the whole system of the relations between parents and their children, from earliest infancy to maturity. The direction of such wider feeling about these relations tended strongly towards an increased closeness in them, more intimacy, and a more continuous suffusion of tenderness and long attachment." His labours in this great cause, "the restoration of the family," give Rousseau a claim upon the gratitude and respect of mankind. It has proved a lasting, solid work. To this day, family relations in France are more gracious, more tender, more close and more inclusive than they are with us. They are more expansive too, leading to generally benign and friendly behaviour, and so strong and satisfying is the family bond that the young people find little necessity to "fall in love." The mother lays herself out for the friendship of her young daughters, who respond with entire loyalty and devotion; and, Zola notwithstanding, French maidens are wonderfully pure, simple, and sweet, because their affections are abundantly satisfied.

Possibly "the restoration of the family" is a labour that invites us here in England, each within the radius of our own hearth: for there is little doubt that the family bond is more lax amongst us than it was two or three generations ago. Perhaps nowhere is family life of more idyllic loveliness than where we see it at its best in English homes. But the wise ever find some new thing to learn. Should we not do well to imitate the inclusiveness of the French family, where mother-in-law and father-in-law, aunt and cousins, widow and spinster, are cherished, and a hundred small offices devised for dependants who would be in the way in an English home? The result is that the children have a wider range for the practice of the thousand sweet attentions and self-restraints which make home life lovely. And again, where family life is most beauteous with us, is not the family a little apt to become self-centred and self-sufficient, rather than to cultivate that expansiveness towards other families which is part of the family code of our neighbours?

(To be continued.)